The Great Amiga Format Blitz Basic 2 Compo Mystery

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

If you've read my piece on the origins of Andy Davidson's Worms you'll know that the competition to which he submitted his entry in November 1993 was won by an Arkanoid-y balloon popping game with a circus theme. We know this because the see-sawing, cloned clown game is snootily cited in every article referencing Worms, and the nasty taste hastily rinsed from the commentator's palette with mouthwash. It's gospel because it's true. Sorry, this isn't a conspiracy story.

Pub trivia time: you may be interested to know that the Dyna Blaster revamp, Blitz Bombers (see The One issue 82 for a four-page preview), was entered in the same contest, and also dismissed. If you're wondering why all three of these entries are so derivative, it's because Amiga Format actively

encouraged the submission of clones within the terms and conditions.

My personal angle concerns the whereabouts of the results. You'd imagine a throng of kids poured blood, sweat and tears into readying their entry for the (extended) February 1994 deadline, so the announcement of the results would be delivered with a fanfare of trumpets and much hyperbole-laded copy.

If the verdict wasn't to be teased on the front cover of the magazine, you'd at least expect it to be highlighted in the contents pages, knowing how many entrants and curious onlookers would be waiting with bated breath. Don't forget, the stakes were pretty high; one of two Amiga 4000

computers was up for grabs, plus the chance to have your game included on a future cover disk and distributed to thousands of fervent Amiga fans and industry insiders. It could have launched the career of an undiscovered, talented coder, making him or her a household name. It was The X-Factor for nerds!

I spent an embarrassing period of time trawling through a dozen issues of Amiga Format to track down the results so *you* don't have to (yeah, yeah, I'm a real hero, enough). You know where I eventually found them? Page 170 of issue 61, dated July 1994. That's a whopping 8 months after the contest was first announced in issue 52; practically 146 in Llama years, probably. No mention of the culmination of the event was made in the contents pages where someone might logically assume would be helpful, let alone on the front cover.

These winners didn't even get to revel in the glory of the outcome occupying a dedicated page. Instead, it was lumped together with two other competition results and wedged next to the magazine staff contact details. No details of the winning games were provided either. No screenshots, not even their titles. Only the names of the two triumphant coders and their location. Let's party like it's 1994! ...yay?

The magazine were true to their word, however, and both games appeared on future cover disks, though presented by their sister publication, Amiga Power (which was also owned by Future Publishing, as they were known then). Arguably this was preferable because it's specifically a games magazine, while Format had a penchant for hardware, development and creativity, hence the spin-off in 1991 (Format had been up and running for two years by that stage).

'Circus' by Graham Mackarel appeared on coverdisk 51b in July 1995 as a full PD release, alongside Missile Command and Spring Time.

It was also given the once-over in Amiga Computing issue 99 in May 1996.

Circus

Programmed by: Graham Mackarel - available from: Underground PD

Owing a large debt to games like Breakout, Circus packs plenty of playability.

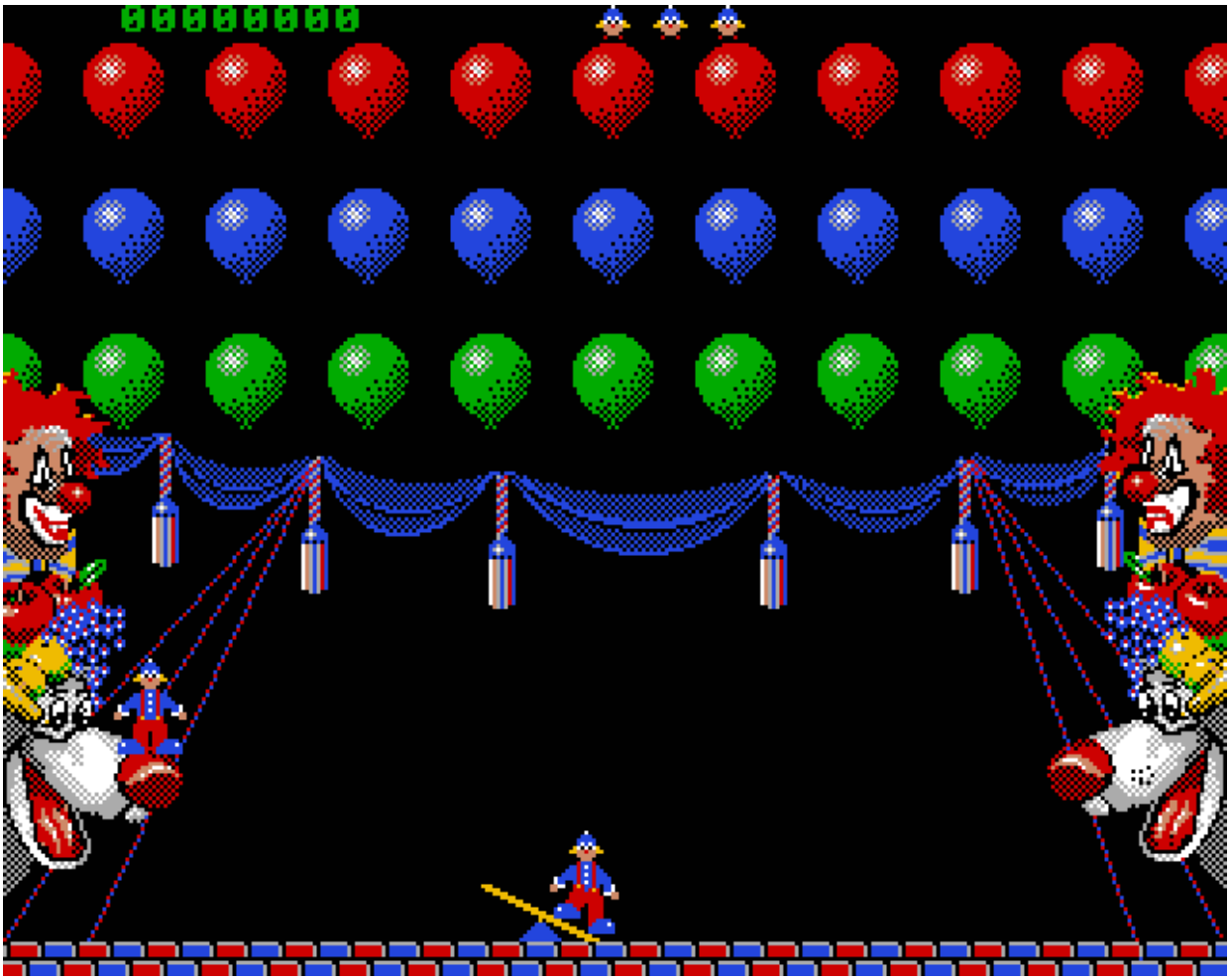
A variation on another classic game of yesteryear, namely Breakout. Here, instead of using a ball to demolish a wall, you use clowns hopping on a seesaw to pop passing balloons.

The game is controlled by mouse and there is a definite knack to making the flying clown land at just the right point on the seesaw to launch the other clown as high as possible into the air.

There are also bonus objects which appear when certain balloons are burst and can be collected to give your clowns special abilities. These include Umbrellas which earn you an extra life and lots of points, Diddy Balloons which allow you to control the flying clown's position with the mouse, and Wings, with which the flying clown can gain extra height.

There's a second game on the disk called Drip, by a bloke called Art Skiles, which bears something of a similarity to Pacman. The objective is to travel around a screenful of pipes, rusting the pipes as you go. Along the way, various enemies will be in pursuit, ranging from ice cubes to electric coils. If they get too close, you can 'drip' yourself down the screen to another pipe.

With 15 levels to negotiate (none of them very easy), Drip presents a long-term challenge. It's been knocking around the Public Domain for some time but as one of two simple but addictive games on this disk, it should provide plenty of entertainment.



'Derring-Do' (a Mr. Do! remake) by Nick H Slaven was included on cover disk 47a in March 1995, also as a full PD release, along with an AGA demo of Guardian.

Derring Do

Collect the cherries but avoid the baddies, as Derring Do proves, the simplest games are often the best!

Remember the Blitz Basic 2 competition organised by Acid Software in AF52? Well, we received some truly excellent games and naturally we thought you'd want to see some of the entries for yourselves. So here's one of the best ones.

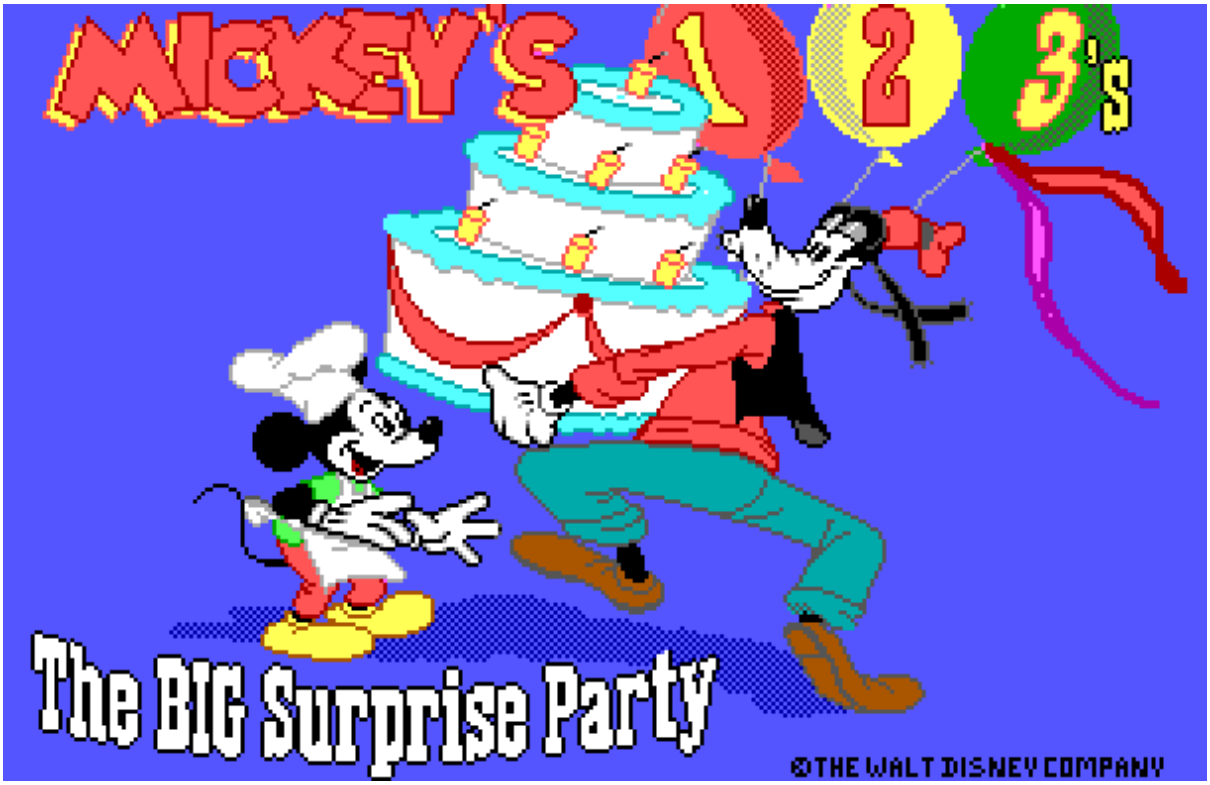
Derring Do was expertly programmed by Amiga Format reader Nick Slaven from Sheffield, and is a Blitz Basic 2 version of the classic arcade game Mr Do! The idea is to guide an apprentice wizard (that's you) around screen after screen of arcade action collecting the little cherries buried beneath the ground. But life isn't as simple as it first appears, as is so often the case in conversions of arcade classics.

Following hot on the heels of our hero is an army of crazed mole-like creatures who aren't keen on the idea of losing their cherries, so to speak, and therefore whizz around trying to do awful things to you.

The little sprite chap isn't completely vulnerable, however - not only can he bounce magic balls off the walls and into the path of the pursuing baddies, but he can also drop strawberries on their heads by digging underneath the fruit. Confused? Give Derring Do a go and the gameplay will become blindingly obvious enjoy!

Nick's game was also later featured on Amiga Format's Subscriber Superdisk 63 in September 1994. These were exclusive bonus extras given as a reward for committing to pay upfront and have the magazine delivered to your front door before it hit the shops. It was accompanied by a 'Backstage' newsletter which included further details of the game.

So there you have it, a 23-year-old miscarriage of justice is finally rectified. Names chiselled on stone tablets, committed to the interweb's history books. Job done.



Neither Nick* or Graham** appear to have gone on to release any follow-up works. No doubt because Amiga Format failed to properly acknowledge their efforts all those years ago, thereby shattering their fragile self-confidence, and dreams of a lucrative career in games development. I wouldn't be at all surprised if they're now living in cardboard boxes on the mean-streets of Leyland and Sheffield. They could even be sharing the *same* box, huddled together to stave off the biting chill of winter's perennial cyclones (it's always winter in Blighty).

Shame on you Amiga Format!!! ...and ! just for good measure.

*Actually Nick went on to become an immensely successful programmer (see Net Yaroze interview no. 7) who has worked in a variety of fields and with a plethora of divergent platforms. You had to go and ruin my punchline didn't you!

**Representing a perfect example of nominative determinism, Graham now works as a fishmonger. The lesson being, never let a barefaced lie get in the way of a good gag.